



FACTSHEET

START: Complete Business Planning for Centers

DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS TO AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES

With START you can develop and track every facet of center business development:

- Develop a budget for your center.
- Plan operations for your center.
- Track and assess program and organizational performance.
- Identify local and national partnerships.

Neighborhood Networks centers make a positive impact in America's communities.

A famous quote states, "If you fail to plan, you should plan to fail." It is estimated that 80 percent of new business ventures fail within the first 5 years after startup. Businesses that do succeed share one thing in common—comprehensive planning. First introduced in 2001, the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START) was designed to assist Neighborhood Networks centers in developing an online business plan that defines and refines their mission, vision, and objectives. Generally, centers report greater success when they create and follow a business plan than when they do not. A START business plan can be a center's blueprint for realizing that success. But like a blueprint, it must be followed and changed according to the dynamics of the community and its potential partners.

Attain Funding and Attract Partners

Whether organized as a nonprofit or for-profit organization, a Neighborhood Networks center must develop income sources, balance revenues and expenditures, and produce results. A business plan is required in an application for an IRS 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Additionally, many public and private funding sources require that a current business plan accompany funding applications. By taking time to develop a comprehensive business plan, you demonstrate to partners and potential investors that your center is a serious venture that is worth supporting.

But START is more than just a marketing tool; it fleshes out the mission and structure of the center. It allows Neighborhood Networks planners to think through ideas, develop solid objectives, and work efficiently toward sustainability. START allows Neighborhood Networks centers to track every facet of their development.

Easy and Convenient to Use

As the developer of the center's business plan, you can work through START at your own pace. Enter as much information in one session as you like. START tracks your progress so that the next time you log in to your business plan, you can continue where you left off. This is your private working document. Without your assistance, no one can read or edit your information until you submit the plan to HUD.

A companion workbook has been developed to walk users through the information collection process prior to entering data in START. Gathering the necessary information in advance makes completing the START business plan much easier. START also performs all the necessary calculations and estimates to help you plan your program. Once you have completed START, your center will have a business plan to guide it through the developmental phase and begin operations.

START is composed of six main sections:

- **Beginning the START Process.**
This step helps users develop a mission statement, determine benefits to



For more information, contact:

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Copies of this fact sheet are available in Spanish and can be requested from the Neighborhood Networks toll-free information center at (888) 312-2743.

stakeholders, identify community resources, gather demographics, etc.

- **Budgeting and Fundraising.** This section includes financial worksheets, center funding, a sources-of-funding worksheet, and fundraising goals.
- **Planning for Center Operations.** This section includes space requirements, equipment, accessibility, and a center operations timeline.
 - **Organization and Management.** Here, users may develop a management timeline, organizational goals, and governance.
 - **Program Planning.** With this step, users may compute a resident survey summary; develop annual program objectives, goals, and activities; project potential outcomes; and create a program calendar.
- **Marketing and Outreach.** Here, centers can record internal/external marketing plans, partnership information, and funding commitments.

Once you have completed and previewed your business plan, it is time to submit it to your HUD Neighborhood Networks coordinator electronically through START. The coordinator reviews and approves the plan online or, if necessary, returns it with comments. Automating the submittal/approval procedure greatly improves the efficiency of the process and augments interaction between a center and its HUD coordinator.

Continue to Track Your Progress

In addition to the six main sections, START also provides the opportunity to generate a yearly assessment report. Goals and objectives are compared to actual results to determine a center's level of success. These assessments are compiled on a yearly basis

and help keep centers on track as well as provide an opportunity to revisit goals and objectives.

More Information

For a copy of the START companion publication, *START Workbook and User Guide*, visit HUD's Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org and download the publication.

Neighborhood Networks staff can provide assistance with START on the Neighborhood Networks toll-free information line, (888) 312-2743, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (e.t.).

You can also ask questions by e-mail: neighborhoodnetworks@hud.gov.

About Neighborhood Networks

Neighborhood Networks' mission is to improve computer access, advance literacy, and create employment opportunities for residents of HUD insured and assisted housing.

- ◆ Neighborhood Networks encourages resident involvement in the planning and developing of self-sustaining centers.
- ◆ Residents gain access to onsite programs and services that provide job skills, education, and supportive services that foster healthier, more self-sufficient families.

Neighborhood Networks centers are located at HUD Multifamily Housing properties throughout all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.